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BETHEL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

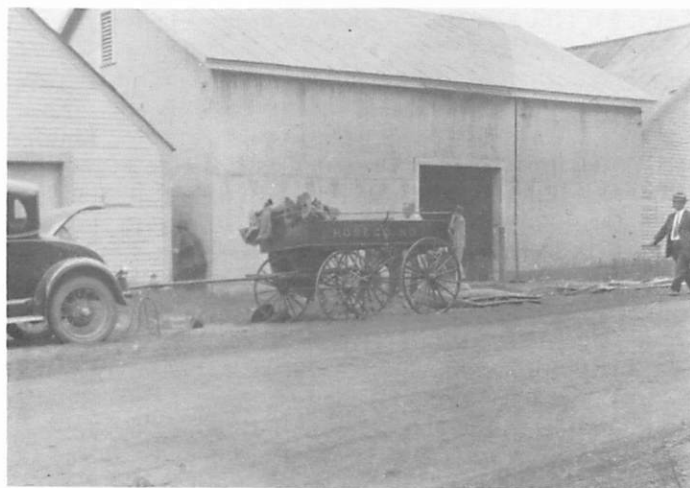
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A Bethel Fire Department Hose Cart, Railroad Street Ca. 1930.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BETHEL FIRE DEPARTMENT

by Ralph S. Hall

EDITOR'S NOTE: The late Ralph Hall (1892-1989) was very interested in the Bethel Fire Department and composed this historical sketch of the Department's history several years before his death.

Few, if any, records are in existence regarding an organized fire department in Bethel previous to 1890, the year the town water system was put into service.

Probably the first units of a fire department consisted of three pieces of equipment, a hook and ladder carriage manned by twelve men, and two hose companies with twelve men assigned to the operation of each hose cart. The department consisted of 36 men and a chief.

One hose company was stationed in a small shed now the site of the present Casco (1992, Key) Bank. The ladder company and another hose company were quartered in a building which was then on the spot of the present fire station.

The hose and ladder wagons were moved from their station to fires using man, horse or later the automobile as the moving force. The members of the department were all volunteers. The compensation was seventy-five cents for the first hour's work at a fire and fifty cents an hour thereafter.

Most of the calls were for chimney fires which were likely to require ladder climbing and scrambling over rooftops, all too often in snowstorms and below zero temperatures.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

In the past decade few local historical societies in Maine have published as much as the Bethel Historical Society. Since 1981, the Society has seen the publication of W. B. Lapham's HISTORY OF BETHEL (a reprint of the 1891 edition with a new introduction and indexes), Randall H. Bennett's OXFORD COUNTY, MAINE: A GUIDE TO ITS HISTORIC RESOURCES, Eva M. Bean's EAST BETHEL ROAD (reprint of 1959 edition with over 200 pages of updated information), BETHEL, MAINE CEMETERIES (a compilation of all the known graves in Bethel with an introductory essay by Society Director Stanley R. Howe), and finally Randall H. Bennett's BETHEL, MAINE: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY, which has received much praise including a highly complimentary review in the *Maine Sunday Telegram*. All of these publications have been made possible through a variety of means: grants, pre-publication sales, donations, etc. Future publications are now being planned to build on this already firm foundation. These will be announced in forthcoming issues of the COURIER, so please read carefully for details.

Jane W. Hosterman

REFLECTIONS OF A HALF CENTURY

(continued from the last issue)

by Leslie E. Davis

All during their school years the children brought many of their schoolmates home with them to visit and play and eat, and all the things kids do together. We took a lot of camping trips, trips to football and basketball games, sightseeing trips and just trips. Phyllis and Kathryn both played basketball while in school and took part in about all the school activities and they had their share of boy friends and dates.

We exposed all three of them to piano lessons, but after a year or so Richard gave it up as he wasn't particularly interested. Phyllis did very well and became an accomplished pianist as well as a good piano accordion player and has continued her interest in music all through life. Kathryn became a good pianist but didn't have the natural talent which Phyllis had.

The summer of 1934 after graduation from the Academy, Richard drove one of my pulpwood trucks hauling pulpwood to Berlin. In October he went to Orono as a freshman at the University of Maine, but at the end of the fall semester in December he came home and told us that he didn't want to put in four years at college, and when I asked him what he did want to do, he said that he would like to do the same kind of business that I was doing.

Of course I suspect most fathers are happy to have their sons want to be in the same business which they are, and I believe I was no exception, but I did believe he should have some extra schooling above high school.

We decided on Wentworth Institute in Boston where he took a two year course in architecture and building trades, which I believe was well worthwhile.

Phyllis, after her post-graduate year at Gould's went on

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SOCIETY SALES DEPARTMENT

The Society maintains a selection of modestly priced gifts and historical publications. These may be ordered at the prices listed below. Maine residents should include 6% sales tax. Orders under \$10 should include \$1 for postage and handling; those over \$10 but under \$20 should include \$2 and all those over \$20 should include \$3 for postage and handling.

Moses Mason House Tile \$3.50
Stationery(package of ten sheets and ten envelopes) \$2 ea.

Moses Mason House Bethel Railroad Station
Summer House Bethel Covered Bridge

Booklets

"Bethel's Broad Street" 75¢
"The Family Farm" 75¢
"Made in Bethel" 75¢
"Dr. Moses Mason and His House" \$1
"Molly Ockett" \$2

Maps and Atlases

1880 Map of Bethel Hill \$2
1880 Map of Entire Town (Bethel) \$2
1878 Bird's Eye View of Bethel Hill \$1
1858 Atlas of Oxford County \$6.50

Tote Bag (Moses Mason Museum logo) sm. \$7.50 lg. \$11.50
Placemats, 4 Season (set of four) \$7.50

Books

Carrie Wight, A HISTORY OF NEWRY \$5
Heywood, HISTORY OF UPTON, MAINE \$10
Hutchinson, THE RUMFORD FALLS & RANGELEY LAKES RAILROAD \$20
BETHEL, MAINE CEMETERIES \$9.50
Russell, INDIAN NEW ENGLAND BEFORE THE MAYFLOWER \$15.95
N.F. Little, AMERICAN DECORATIVE WALL PAINTING 1700-1850 \$9.95
R. Crosby, FROM AN OLD LEATHER TRUNK \$5
W. B. Lapham, HISTORY OF WOODSTOCK, MAINE \$19.95
King, THE WHITE HILLS \$18
THE WHITE MOUNTAINS: PLACE & PERCEPTIONS \$9.95
Holt, GRAND TRUNK LINES OF NEW ENGLAND \$29.95
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Bennett, BETHEL, MAINE: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY \$39.95
M.F. King, ANNALS OF OXFORD \$48
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Post Cards: Dr. Mason, Agnes Mason,

Moses Mason House 10¢ ea.
Bethel Historical Society Calendar, 1992 \$7

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(L.E. Davis Memoirs, continued from page 3)

to three years of training at the New England Deaconess Hospital in Boston and got her R.N. in both Massachusetts and Maine in 1940.

Kathryn took the commercial course at Gould, and after graduation she went to Westbrook Junior College at Portland for their secretarial course; the training at Gould was so well advanced that she completed the two year course at Westbrook in one year and went to work in the office of Ernst & Ernst, Public Accountants in Portland.

There is one other boy who should be mentioned in this story as he was nearly as much a part of our family as though he was an own brother to Richard. Arthur Gibbs, better known as "Dutchy" was nearly always with Richard in any project, episode, expedition, party, trip or what have you that went on. He was in the same grades in town schools and same class in the Academy, and much of the time when Richard had a job "Dutch" worked with him. After Richard went into business for himself, "Dutch" Gibbs always worked for him until he died suddenly of a heart attack in 1953. There are too few good men like him.

During all the years that our children were at home with us on the Middle Intervale farm, we kept one or two cows and starting with two work horses about 1934 we had as many as six work horses in 1938 to 1940. Phyllis and Kathryn like horses very much and during their teenage years, coaxed us into finding a pony to keep for them to ride and play with.

It took quite a lot of coaxing for me to consent to having one because I suspected I would have to be the one to take care of it. Of course they promised and agreed to take all the care of it, if we would only let them have one. We had two or three different ponies for them over the years and the results nearly always followed the same pattern. For the first two or three weeks the pony got extra special care, but after a month or so Poppa was the one who saw to it that he got feed and water enough to keep him alive. Richard didn't care anything at all about horses and I doubt if he could even put a halter on one. He certainly wouldn't if he could avoid it.

(to be continued in the next issue)

BOOK REVIEW

A Pictorial History of Oxford, Maine. Compiled and published by members of the Oxford Historical Society, 1991.

Hebron: Then to Now. Compiled and edited by Richard E. Bedford. Hebron, Me.: Hebron Bicentennial Committee, 1991.

The Thompson Lake Book: A Narrative History. By Joan C. Madden and Margaret E. Slattery. Oxford, Me.: Thompson Lake Environmental Association, 1991.

With its beginnings in the early nineteenth century, when capsule sketches of many western Maine towns appeared in William D. Williamson's *History of the State of Maine*, the study and recording of local history in the Oxford County area has proceeded at an accelerated pace. Around the time of the Americana Bicentennial, in the mid-1970s, the publication of works devoted to the local past gained a renewed sense of purpose. The three volumes briefly discussed here are the results of the continued popularity of Maine town histories and works like them.

Focusing on what was once known as "Shepardsfield Plantation" but is now the towns of Hebron and Oxford, two

of the volumes in question develop their story around the "built environment" in an attempt to chronicle the local past. In *A Pictorial History of Oxford, Maine and Hebron: Then to Now* readers are presented with a wealth of illustrative material, including rare early views of houses, farmsteads, churches, schools, businesses, covered bridges, and the like. In and of themselves, the buildings and sites (and occasionally people) featured in each book tell only part of the story, though the limited amount of text which accompanies each provides the raw data of what good town histories are made of. By including more information, the Oxford "history" seems to be the more successful of the two in this regard, though both books, being basically arranged geographically by neighborhoods and villages, would have benefited by the inclusion of maps which keyed the photos to specific locations (the Oxford book *does* feature such a map for the section on district schoolhouses), as was done in a recent pictorial work on the town of Woodstock. Both books leave one yearning to learn more about these interesting towns, and, luckily, there are other, previously published historical works which "fill in the blanks" somewhat and provide a context for the newly-presented material. To those interested in adding the Hebron volume, in particular, to their personal collections, it should be pointed out that the process used to reproduce the photos in its pages left many as washed-out images, which is regrettable. Perhaps, at a later time, a second edition could be produced using the method of printing employed by the Oxford Historical Society. Notwithstanding, both books go far in preserving images of what two inland Maine communities looked like in years past.

Bordering on the towns of Poland, Oxford, Otisfield, and Casco, Thompson Lake is the subject of the well-illustrated volume *The Thompson Lake Book: A Narrative History*. In eleven chapters covering such diverse subjects as the geology of the lake, the history of the towns surrounding it, the background of the numerous recreational camps and tourist cottages at its edge, and the formation of the Thompson Lake Environmental Association (which published this book), the narrative carries the reader back to a time when Indians roamed the hills surrounding the lake. Eventually, the text and photos arrive at a time when the heavy use of the lake has brought concern for the quality of its water and the great variety of wildlife it supports. The story of Thompson Lake is not unlike that of numerous lakes and ponds in Maine which were "discovered" by tourists in the nineteenth century and remain drawing cards for Maine's seasonal tourist industry. *The Thompson Lake Book* answers a need to make more people aware of the lake's spectacular but fragile environment. No doubt the book will serve as a model for other histories of this type in the future.

Randall H. Bennett

(Fire Department, continued from page 1)

Risking life and limb for seventy-five cents an hour could hardly be considered over-payment, but the job was done, and by companies of men who voluntarily joined the fire department.

An alarm bell was installed on top of the upper station with a rope attached to the clapper so it could be sounded from the street level. Sometime later a second bell was put into service. This bell was mounted on the roof of the lower hose station. Still later an electric siren was substituted for this lower station bell.



Ralph Hall (center) is presented a plaque in recognition of his many years of service to the Bethel Fire Department by Chief Harold Carver. Looking on are Fire Department members (left to right): David Myers, Earl Hutchinson and Craig Davis. 1970s photo.

Eventually the siren was moved from the roof of the lower hose unit shelter to the upper hose and ladder house, then after a few years, to the cupola of the present fire station where it is now in operation along with a compressed air horn to sound an alarm of fire.

The original bell is not used now and will probably be placed on the common or other viewable spot as a memorial to the Bethel volunteer fire department of days gone by.

In 1936 the first gasoline driven pumper was purchased by the town. This American LaFrance unit was in service about eighteen years until its pump gave out and could no longer be used.

In 1954 a Mack Pumper was ordered, but before the truck was delivered, a used Buffalo pumper was purchased and used to fill in the gap until the Mack truck arrived. This Mack unit is to be replaced soon by a modern American LaFrance pumper so Bethel can count on fine fire protection by modern equipment and a competent and loyal crew of men.

Grateful acknowledgment for the information on which the foregoing article is based is hereby extended to Herbert Rowe, a former Bethel fireman and Lloyd Luxton, who was chief of the department for 17 years.

IN MEMORIAM

Died, February 7, 1992, Alice L. Mundt, Contributing Member

Died, March 23, 1992, Margaret Herrick Oakes, Life Member

Died, March 31, 1992, Rev. Elwin L. Wilson, Contributing Member

Died, April 6, 1992, Ernest Holt, Life Member

Died, April 28, 1992, Ernest A. Mundt, Sustaining Member

GENEALOGICAL INQUIRY

Les Whall, 990 West Foxglove Drive, Salt Lake City, UT 84123 requests any information or statistics regarding the parents or grandparents of Col. John York of Bethel, ME, born about 1748, who died 7 April 1838.

James Anderson, Newry; Marjorie Anderson, Topsham; Peter Anderson, Bethel; Kathy Bailey, N. Highlands, CA; Mary Bakeman, Roseville, MN; Danny Barker, E. Stoneham; Dorothy Bartlett, Bethel; Francine Lake Bergman, Key Colony Beach, FL; Eleanor Bestick, Braintree, MA; Lewis Bissell, Jackson, NH; Andrea Blake, Albany, GA; James Blake, Albany, GA; Reba H. Bloom, Clinton, NJ; Carl R. Brooks, West Paris; Eleanor Brooks, Bethel; Bernice E. Brown, Rumford Center; Geneva H. Brown, Norway; Martha Brown, Bethel; Maxine Brown, Bethel; Merton Brown, Bethel; Robert A. Brown, Hanover; Ida C. Bryant, Bangor; Lois Burgess, Bethel; Sumner Burgess, Bethel; Arthur L. Burt, Rockville, MD; Norm Buttrick, Freeport; Stewart Byron, Madison, CT; Thomas Carter, Bethel; Franklin S. Chapman, Bethel; Jack Chapman, Bethel; Rosalind R. Chapman, Bethel; Greta Clifford, Cape Elizabeth; Mary Clyne, Mohawk, NY; Ellen Coffin, Norway; Liz Como, Bethel; Ben B. Conant, So. Paris; Roger Conant, Bethel; Robert B. Congdon, Islesboro; Helen Connolly, Port Ludlow, WA; Judith A. Coolidge, Bethel; Victor Coolidge, Bethel; Carol Crandall, Bethel; Richard Crandall, Bethel; Eve Crumpton, Oxford; Brian Dalton, N. Dighton, MA; Rhonda Dalton, N. Dighton, MA; John Davis, South Paris; Linda Davis, Bethel; Theodore R. Davis, Jr., Bethel; Gretchen M. Dock, Newton, MA; James Dock, Beaverton, OR; Nancy H. Dock, El Cajon, CA; Roger L. Dock, Glastonbury, CT; Dr. Stephen Dock, Greenville, NC; Gayland Dooen, Bethel; Mary Dooen, Bethel; Horton W. Emerson, Jr., Gorham; Natalie C. Fain, Bethel; Richard A. Fain, Bethel; Edna E. Fallon, Bethel; Martha M. Farrington, Oxford; Charlotte Flower/Shinn, Hopkins, MN; Charles B. Fobes, Portland; Dorothy H. Fortier, Falmouth; Joanne P. Fortier, Windham; Marion M. Foskett, St. Petersburg, FL; Betsey Susan Foster, Portland; Jeffrey J. Frankel, Hanover; Orlando Fraser, Vidalia, GA; Richard Fraser, E. Poland; Alice Fuller, So. Hamilton, MA; John Gagnon, Elliot; Dan Gibbons, Cumberland; Paul R. Given, New Gloucester; Jonathan Goldberg, Bethel; Jeri Greenwell, Bethel; Marjorie Greer, Cascade, MT; Charles Haines, Bethel; Charlene Haines, Bethel; Fred Haines, Jr., Bethel; George Haines, Bethel; John Haines, Locke Mills; Mary Lee Haines, Bethel; Nancy Haines, Locke Mills; Peter T. Haines, Bethel; Elizabeth A. Hall, Centerville, MA; Nancy Hanscom, Bethel; Frances Harding, Bryant Pond; Richard Harding, Sr., Bryant Pond; Judith E. Haskell, Bethel; Fred Hayden, Mexico; David Heyman, Port Washington, NY; Nadine Heyman, Port Washington; Lucille Holman, Dixfield; Lyman Holman, Dixfield; Christine Holmes, Norfolk, MA; Kerry Mason Hood, Seekonk, MA; Virginia Hood, Largo, FL; Christopher J. Hovey, Farmingdale; Alfred F. Howard, Manchester; Allan R. Howe, Bethel; Diane S. Howe, Bethel; Jennifer Howe, Severn, MD; John P. Howe, Spokane, WA; Sue Howe, Bethel; Tanya Howe, Severn, MD; Marita Hunton, Norway; Lee Hutchins, Bethel; Virginia Hutchins, Bethel; Irene Hutchinson, Dixfield; R. Douglas Hutchinson, Dixfield; Thomas B. Johnson, Bridgton; Diane Jones, Fryeburg; Frances E. Jordan, Poland; Dene Kaufner, Redding, CA; Eugene L. Kelly, Jr., Bethel; Mary Jo Kelly, Bethel; Virginia M. Kelly, Bethel; Earlon Keniston, Bethel; Mary C. Keniston, Bethel; Mary Jane Kennedy, Orlando, FL; Carroll Kimball, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada; Evaline Kimball, Bethel; Gerald Kimball, Gray; Earl Lamoreau, Jr., Bethel; Lois Leavitt, Gorham, NH; Reuell Leavitt, Gorham, NH; Linda L. Lehans, Holden, MA; Mary M. Little, Presque Isle; Roy Lord, Augusta; James R. Lowe, Bethel; Ramona F. Lowe, Bethel; Rodney C. Lynch, Bethel; Carolyn MacDormand, N. Hampton, NH; Donald Marrer, Penfield, NY;

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Francis Berry, Bethel
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EDITOR'S CORNER

Instead of our regular Member Profile feature I thought it might be appropriate to focus on the passing of three members who contributed much to the Society and to my knowledge of the area's past.

Margaret Herrick Oakes (1896-1992), a life member, made a number of significant donations to the Society through the years. She also was a faithful contributor to the Society's endowment and a devoted reader of the COURIER. For me her most important role was the amount of time she spent writing letters about Bethel's past or talking with me on tape about her many memories of the town. She never lost her interest in Bethel or its people despite many years away.

Ernest Holt (1905-1992) was a life member and a generous donor of artifacts to the Society; he also was an incredible source of information on many families and local events. I never tired of listening to Ernest's stories and the history of the area is richer because he remembered so much.

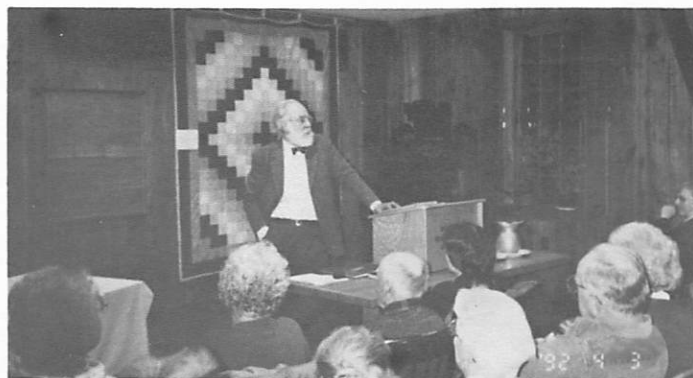
Rev. Elwin Wilson (1898-1992) was also a remarkable source of information on the town of his birth. He recorded quite a few memories and I particularly enjoyed visiting him in Orono on one occasion where he shared many photographs of farming in Bethel during his early years.

All three of these members were exceedingly kind and generous to me and I am the richer for having known them.

SRH

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Society member Ernest Cassara, Ph.D., a retired university history teacher, addressed the April month meeting on "The Witches of Salem" to commemorate the 300th anniversary of a dark part of New England's past.

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